

Conference Paper

Teaching Vocabulary Techniques Through Letterland in Star Kiddy Preschool Semarang

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Abstract

This study is important to be conducted because vocabulary is a fundamental skill and a vocabulary competency involves students' self-confidences in class participation. Because of that reason, teacher has to teach vocabulary since children because children are better learners of language (Gordon, 2007). So the writer conducted this study to find out the answer to the question of what are the teaching vocabulary techniques that Star Kiddy Preschool's teachers use through letterland. The writer began this study with included observing two teachers in Star Kiddy Preschool who teach in letterland class. The writer observed two classes with different teachers. While observing the classes, the writer recorded how the teachers taught in class to find out the teaching vocabulary technique through letterland. After reviewing teachers' video recording and discover the teaching vocabulary techniques, the writer interviewed each teacher. As the result, there are four techniques that they used to teaching vocabulary. They are picture, real object, guessing and translation.

Keywords: vocabulary, technique, letterland, children.

Received: 18 January 2019

Accepted: 24 March 2019

Published: 31 March 2019

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ICEST 2018 Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is a fundamental skill that learners have to learn before they learn the other skills in learning language because without knowing vocabulary, learners will face so many difficulties. According to the Nation (1994), a rich of vocabulary makes the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing become easier to be performed.

According to McGlothlin cited in Yaverbaum (2003), language learning process is divided into two parts. The first is about how the new language comes to the learner such as their surrounded environment, and then the second part is about how the learner comes to the language. It is involved techniques that they use to learn language especially at school and this is teachers' job to find and decide what techniques they will use in teaching learning process.

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Some teachers use “Letterland” because they think that it was an effective approach to teach children. In this approach, students will learn about sounds by a combination of alphabet letters, but it is not enough because actually they also need to learn vocabularies which are contained the same sound like they learn the day so they will not only learn about the correct sounds of alphabets but also about how to pronounce the correct sounds in form of words.

Star Kiddy Preschool Semarang is one of schools that also apply “letterland” approach in their teaching learning process. The school designed a class which uses this approach once a week for beginner level. In this class, students learn about the sound of alphabets. After that, teacher will introduce some vocabularies which have similar sound as the sound of alphabet that students learn that day.

Many researchers also tried to do research about teaching children like Silverman and Crandell (2011) about vocabulary practices in prekindergarten and kindergarten classroom. In their study, they tried to show the relationship between teachers’ vocabulary instruction and prekindergarten and kindergarten children’s vocabulary. They observed 16 teachers and assessed 244 children performance on target world knowledge and general vocabulary knowledge at the beginning and the end of the year. The result shows that there were some practices were associated with higher vocabulary performance. The other result was the effectiveness of some practices sometimes related to the teachers’ practices whether they use or not in read-aloud time and non-read-aloud time. Therefore, this study was conducted to answer a question: What are the teaching vocabulary techniques that Star Kiddy Preschool’s teachers use through letterland?

Teaching vocabulary to young learner such as kindergarten children is not easy. Teachers must be creative. In letterland, teachers must be able to teach vocabulary besides teaching sounds. Because of that, this study will describe the teaching vocabulary techniques through letterland. Accordingly, this study will be useful to give insight and better understanding about teaching vocabulary through letterland to help teachers in deciding the appropriate techniques for their class especially for kindergarten teachers.

2. Methodology

The instruments that are use in this study, how to get the data and how the data will be analyze.

2.1. Context of study

This study was done in Star Kiddy Preschool Semarang. The writer chose this school because language that they use as the medium of instruction is English. And this school has Letterland class which introduced some vocabularies to the students in each meeting.

2.2. Participants

The participants were Teacher A and Teacher B. Both of them were female teachers who teach in the beginner level (Kindergarten 2).

2.3. Instruments

Instruments of data collection that the writer used were observation and interview. The writer observed the teachers' teaching vocabulary technique through letterland. Then by using interview, the writer looked for the further explanations about the teaching vocabulary techniques based on the observation.

2.4. Data collection procedures

The observation was done in a month. The writer observed once a week for each class and interviewed each teacher twice a week. Then the interviews with the teachers were conducted four times. The lengths of the interviews were about 15 minutes for each teacher. During the observation, the writer recorded the teachers when they taught in class and after two times observation. The interview was based on the interview guides and the technique of interview was based on stimulated recall. Based on the Nguyen, McFadden, Tangen, et.al. (2013), Stimulated recall interview is a research method or technique to investigate teachers' decision making process and behaviors by showing their teaching video. Through laptop, the teachers were able to watch their teaching video. So if they forgot what they had done in class, they could remember by watching their video and could explain about what they did in class.

3. Data Analysis Procedure

After getting the data, the writer analyzed the techniques that the teachers used in teaching vocabulary through letterland. First, the writer transcribed each interview recording into word file. Then, the writer found some of teaching vocabulary techniques in the word file. Third, the writer described each teaching vocabulary techniques that the writer have already found in the transcription data.

4. Finding and Discussion

Based on the observation, the writer found there were four techniques that the teachers used in class. The techniques were picture, real object, guessing and translation.

4.1. Picture

The first technique that the teachers frequently used was picture. As the found in the video recording of these teachers, they used colorful printed picture all the time. Teacher A and teacher B used this technique in every meeting in letterland class.. The reasons why the teachers used pictures to teach their students are providing children visual learning, grabbing students“ attention, and helping students to memorize.

As stated by teacher A;

“letterland is a learning method that contained of all children learning style such as auditory, visual and kinesthetic. It is not only one learning style. If I taught children by telling a story, they will only learn through auditory because they just listen. If I add pictures, they will learn visually also”.

Teacher A“s statement above means that each student in her class has different learning style, for example there are some students who enjoy auditory learning like listening a video or teacher“s explanation, some of them enjoy in kinesthetic learning like memorizing words through action trick, and some of them maybe enjoy visual learning and in this case, Teacher A used pictures to provide students who learn visually.

According to teacher B, It is very useful to grab students“ attention using picture because through picture, children also can see the thing directly.

Another reason was stated by teacher B. In the video observation, she asked her students to touch a picture one by one while pronounced the word in English. Teacher B said;

“I asked them touched the picture one by one because I want them to saw the picture clearly so they will recognize the character and know the meaning of the picture. I wish they were able to recognize and memorize the vocabulary soon through that way”.

Through that statement, Teacher B explained that picture really helps students to memorize words because if they learn a word while see the picture of the word, they will create the same image in their brain about the word. So whenever they see the similar picture or the real object of the picture, they will be able to recognize it and know the name in the target language. For example when the writer observed Teacher A’s class in the first week, Teacher A taught the student about “kite” using picture. Then in the fourth week when Teacher A summarized the entire lessons in week 1, 2 and 3, Teacher A also asked again about “kite” but through real object.

Teacher A: “Do you remember what is it?” (While touching a kite which was sticked on the class room’s wall)

Student 1: “Layang- layang.” (Layang- layang in English is “kite”)

Teacher A: “What the name in English?”

Some Students: “Kite!”

Teacher A: “Yes, very good. It is a kite.”

Based on the explanation and example above, picture is an effective technique to use in vocabulary teaching for children because they can memorize better. That is why Teacher B believes that using picture is a good technique to introduce a new word because through picture, children will easily know and understand the meaning of a new word so they will memorize better.

4.2. Real object

Using real object is the second technique that the teachers use. Both teacher A and teacher B have one similar reason why they use real object. Their reason is because real object is better technique to teach vocabulary rather than using picture because students can see and touch the real object of a word.

Teacher A stated;

“Actually using real object is better than using picture because children will be able to see the real shape.”

In the statement, teacher A told that using real object to teach children was more effective than using picture because they can directly know the real shape that they can feel and touch. It is in line with what Allen stated in his book titled “Technique in Teaching Vocabulary” (1983: pg.24), “But real object are better than pictures whenever we have them in classroom. When there are real windows, doors, walls, desks and clocks in the classroom, it is foolish not to use them in our teaching”. It is true that real objects are better than pictures because children are able to see not only the picture of an object but they see the real object. Teacher A stated that sometimes is impossible to bring the real object in class if the objects are difficult to find or to bring, but if the real objects are easy to get or if it is already provided in class, it is better to use them.

The second similar statement was by teacher B. She said;

“If there is the real object, it will be better because they can touch and see the real shape of the object, so it will help them to memorize better.”

According to teacher B statement, she also agreed that using real object was better than using picture in teaching vocabulary especially to children because they can experience with the object directly. It is in line with Pinter (2006) that “when presenting vocabulary to youngest children, teachers can first introduce things they can see, feel, play with, touch, and experience every day”. So for children, using real object is more effective than using picture because with real object, children are able to see, touch, and feel the object so they can understand, recognize and memorize the words better.

4.3. Guessing

The third technique that the writer found in teaching vocabulary was guessing. Teacher A and B used this technique but not really often. They used this technique to stimulate their students’ knowledge about a word because sometimes, some students already knew the meaning of the word.

In the interview section, Teacher A said;

“I want them to guess first because maybe some of them know the name. So before I told them, at least they will be able to guess.”

Based on the statement, Teacher A use guessing technique to gain students’ knowledge because sometimes there are some students know the word or if they do not know the word, at least the students try to answer with some possible words. When students answer using some possible words, teacher will know what words that the students have known.

During the observation, the writer found that teacher A only used this technique one time. It was in the third observation when she taught about “Lucy Lamp Light“. When she started to tell a story, she mentioned a word “torch“ and she asked the students to guess the word of “torch“ in their first language (L1) through action strict and context clues, and some of students were able to guess.

As teacher A, teacher B also used guessing techniques once during my observation. She told;

“I asked my students to guess because I want to check whether they know the word or not.”

So sometimes Teacher B use this technique consciously to check her students“ knowledge whether they know the word or not. In the observation lthe writer found Teacher B also used this technique in week 3.

4.4. Translation

This technique was the most rarely used. Teacher A and B used this technique to facilitate students“ L1. If students still did not understand the meaning of a word through teaching technique above, teacher would translate it.

Both teacher A and B used this technique as the last option. They really avoid translating a word in their class except they do not have other option. It was difficult to found example of the use of translating technique from both teachers because they really avoid this technique, but the writer found once by teacher A.

Teacher A:” Lucy Lamp Light likes to help anyone who cannot find the way to their home. For example at night you go to letterland and you do not bring any torch. What is„torch“? Do you know what is„torch“?” (While practicing a gesture like bringing a torch and the teacher“s tumb pressing the ON button)

Student 1: “Jempol!” (Jempol is Indonesian language. In English is tomb)

Teacher A: “No. Torch is something that you can turn it on and you can see at the night.” (While practicing a gesture or action trick like turn on a torch)

Student 2: “Senter.”

Teacher A: “Yes, very good! Torch in Bahasa Indonesia is “senter“. The name is “torch“.

From the example above, Teacher A asked the students to guess first and Teacher A also gave some clues to help the students to guess. At the end, the students were able

to guess the word but in Indonesian language and Teacher A know that her students were only know the word in Indonesian, then Teacher A decided to told the students the word in English as the last option.

According to the observation, they did not translate a word in the beginning. First they used other techniques to explain the meaning, but if the student still did not understand, teacher A and teacher B translated the word in students' L1. Translating words is not a main technique to teach vocabulary for children. This technique only use to facilitate in students' L1. When teacher teach them using other teaching vocabulary techniques, but they still do not understand, teacher will translate the word because sometimes they only know the word in their L1.

5. Conclusion

The writer conducted this study in order to find the teaching vocabulary techniques to kindergarten children through letterland. In conclusion, four teaching techniques that the teachers of Star Kiddy Preschool used. There were picture, real object, guessing and translation.

The first is using pictures. They believe that using pictures can provide children visual learning, grab students' attention, and help students to memorize. Then the second technique is using real object. The functions of using real object to teach vocabulary are almost similar with using picture, but it is better since the students can touch and see the shape of the real object. The next technique is guessing. This technique is very useful to stimulate students' background knowledge because sometimes students already know the name of a thing. The last technique is "translation". This is the simplest technique because the teachers only translate a word from target language to students' L1, but this is the last option that the teachers use in teaching vocabulary. They use this technique to facilitate students in their L1 if needed. In teaching a vocabulary, teachers not only use a single technique, but sometimes the teachers combined more than one technique in teaching a vocabulary to the students because if the first technique is does not work, teachers have to use another technique until the students know and understand.

Vocabulary is a fundamental skill that learners have to learn before they learn the other skills in learning language and because of this, vocabulary should be taught since children. That is why through this study the writer try to give insight and better understanding to teacher about what are the techniques can be used in teaching vocabulary especially for children, so kindergarten teacher will know the more appropriate techniques in teaching vocabulary through letterland.

Even though this study give contribution to help teacher in deciding appropriate techniques in teaching children vocabulary, this study still has limitation. The first, this study was only involved two teachers as the participants and might not represent the majority of the teachers in kindergarten. Second, the context of this study was only limited through letterland. So further study was suggested to explore the teaching vocabulary technique for young learner through the other teaching approach such as story, games, song, etc.

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